



The Technique of Democracy

If we are to build a real democracy, our most serious attention will have to be given to the foundation. We must build from the bottom up and not from the top down. We must, in other words, build on the foundation of the average common man.

Democracy Builds from the Bottom Up

The very nature of democracy is opposed to dictatorship, no matter how benign the dictator. The sure builder of democracy will realize that the quickest way of achieving his program is to go down and build up the crowd into fit instruments for putting across its ideals. Any other method of procedure would be like building a foundation on sand.

Great Leaders Are Developed by Great People

The essence of democracy is that people are intelligent enough to manage their affairs in such a way that, in case of necessity, the right man appears at the right time and in response to the express will of the people.

A leader might come as if from heaven. While this is possible, it ought not ordinarily be necessary in a democracy. The ordinary way is that the people, by intelligent action, throw up the man who is able to do the job. He is appointed and commended to take the lead. It is not a question so much of finding a man on the top to work down, as of getting a people who are in a position to force the appearance of such a man from their midst. No man will serve democracy and preserve it unless the free will of a people has forced him to appear.

How Can a people Develop Greatness?

What are the proper steps to be taken in Canada or United States of America to so condition the nation that it can produce or call forth such leaders?

The first call is for the exercise of greater intelligence and this can only be achieved by widening the field in which men's minds function. It is fairly safe principle to assert that a large number of the dominating class in society today are great, because of the fact that they had a chance to function in important fields of human endeavor, rather than by reason of their native ability. In the rank and file of common men today there is to be found just as much brains as among those who run things.

The next call, therefore, is for ways and means of organizing the people to exploit every possible field within reach and especially the economic field. To use a phrase of John Dewey's, the place to begin is at their own doors and they must learn to act with and for others while they do their own thinking.

They must turn their backs on the philosophy of rugged individualism that has left so many of them

ragged. Having explored the fields at their own doors, intelligence will be stimulated and they will gradually become great by the things they do.

First, by the exercise of intelligence; second, by beginning at its own door; third, by increasing the scope of its activities -- these are the legitimate means by which society grew to its present stature.

We are not looking primarily for leaders. What we want is a people. No body of men is worthy of a socially just society unless it is able to merit it by its intelligence and its moral backbone. If they got it otherwise they would not appreciate it nor long maintain it.

Old Dogs Can Learn New Tricks

It is not yet ten years since we learned through the scientific study and research of Dr. Thorndike and others that the average adult is educationally worthy of his place in the sun. Up to that time we judged what Coriolanus contemptuously called the "musty superfluity," by a role-of-thumb psychology, and settled the question by dogmatically affirming that old dogs could not be taught new tricks; that they cannot "get" anything new. We did not discover until very recently that "age, in itself, is a minor factor in either success or failure, that capacity, interest, energy, and time are the essentials, that adult education suffers no mystical handicap because of the age of the student." The old saying "Childhood is the time for learning" is being replaced by the new slogan: "The time for learning anything is the time when you need it."

It is fundamental that the friends and promoters of co-operation should give serious attention to this new development in the field of education. The experiment only needs to be given a fair trial to convince one of the vast amount of latent talent and energy that await release to be used for the common good.

-Consumer's Cooperation, May, 1935.

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